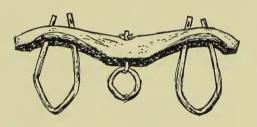
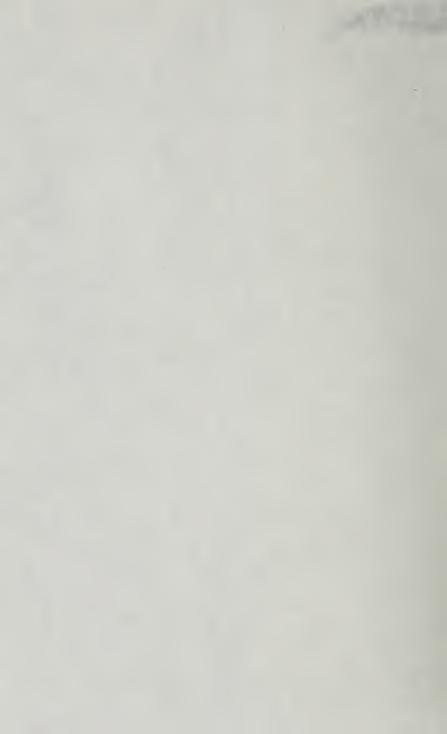
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Ahab Lincoln: a tragedy of the Potomac.

LINCOLN ROOM



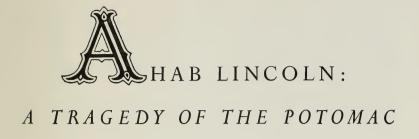
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HAB LINCOLN: A TRAGEDY OF THE POTOMAC





By

Stephen Franks Miller

With an Introduction by

Richard Harwell

Chicago: THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE: 1958



HE FAME CAME LATER.

In his own time Abraham Lincoln was a figure of scorn and hate as much as a figure of admiration. He was elected President by a minority party in a particularly bitter political campaign.

Papers in his own section of the country denounced him as bitterly as did the press and the politicians of the South. Personal and political vilification of Lincoln continued in the North after his election. It was magnified after each military reverse suffered by Union troops and in the political canvass of 1864. In the Confederacy Lincoln was quickly seized on as a focus of hate, and denunciation of him was throughout the war a shibboleth of Confederate loyalty.

Anti-Lincoln feeling pervaded the whole of the South. In a particularly derogatory lampoon published in *The Southern Illustrated News* in 1863, the Confederacy's soldier-novelist John Esten Cooke imagined a North despaired of finding a military man to conduct its "On to Richmond" campaign. "Bankrupt of generals," he wrote, "and fired by the genius of battle, King Abraham himself will don the nodding plume, and buckle on the panoply of war. . . .

"From the awful picture thus evoked from the realms of the imagination, the mind recalls with horror. King Abraham charging at the head of his victorious legions, and joking even in the heat of battle, is a thought too terrific to dwell upon. Let us hope that this is only imagination: . . . that if the great Abraham is to join the headless procession, his ugly visage will be removed by his own betrayed countrymen—by the men whose rights he has denied, whose persons he has immured in his loathsome bastiles, whose sons and brothers he has murdered upon Southern battlefields—by that nation which the whole world despises now, because they regard this Buffoon as its type."

Much of the Southern vitriol heaped upon Lincoln was vocal—private or in the untranscribed speeches of the time. Much of

it was in the newspapers and magazines. A little was in the even more ephemeral broadside songs. Venom infused many of the more serious political pamphlets with poison about Lincoln. Only a handful of separate book or pamphlet publications, however, relate so directly to him as to deserve places in a special library of Lincoln materials: Ahab Lincoln: A Tragedy of the Potomac, Abram: A Military Poem, The Devil's Visit to Old Abe, Old Abe, the Miller, and The Royal Ape.

Most pretentious of the Confederate anti-Lincoln publications was William Russell Smith's *The Royal Ape*, a lengthy, reasonably well written, but foolishly intemperate, closet drama by an otherwise distinguished Alabama judge, politician, and literary figure. Smith wrote wisely, however, when he penned into his play the lines:

"If in the hurry of debate I uttered
Aught that is thought to bear a touch unkind,
It should be charged to the intemperance
Of these disjointed times."

Excepting Smith's play, the only title in this group with any quality of literary competence was another, shorter, closet drama, *Ahab Lincoln: A Tragedy of the Potomac*, written early in the war by Stephen Franks Miller of Georgia, and published in 1861 at Milledgeville, Georgia.

Miller was a citizen of some stature. Born in North Carolina in 1810, he had moved to Georgia as a young man and was active in legal circles. In 1840 he removed to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where he edited *The Monitor*, a Whig journal, till 1847. For the next two years he worked with *DeBow's Review* in New Orleans. He then returned to Georgia where he lived till his death in 1867. He is best remembered as the author of *The Bench and Bar of Georgia* (1858) but wrote also *Memoir of Gen. David Blackshear* (1858) and a novel, *Wilkins Wylder; or, The Successful Man* (1860). At the time *Ahab Lincoln* was written he was working on *The Southern Recorder*, a newspaper in Milledgeville.

Ahab Lincoln is the rarest of the rare. It survives in only one

copy from its original printing (at the Confederate Museum in Richmond, Virginia). That copy, even, is apparently imperfect, being without wrappers or title page. (Stains on the binding edge indicate that it probably once had wrappers.) In it Miller handles blank verse with some dexterity. His characterization of Lincoln is not completely unkind and that of General Winfield Scott surprisingly sympathetic. The delineation of Seward is based on the popular Southern interpretation of him during the first months of Lincoln's administration. The portrayals of Jefferson Davis, Alexander H. Stephens, and General P. G. T. Beauregard are also accurate reflections of popular Southern attitudes of the time and are, of course, completely pro-Confederate. Ahab Lincoln is without real literary merit. It can claim no historical importance. Yet it is of real and enduring interest as a Lincoln item and as a Confederate item, as a souvenir of Civil War history that still breathes the spirit of those times.

RICHARD HARWELL

San Marino, California 25 March 1958



Ahab Lincoln: A Tragedy of the Potomac

DRAMATIC PERSONS

AHAB LINCOLN, President United States
SEWARD, Secretary of State
SCOTT, Lieutenant General, U. S.
DAVIS, President Confederate States
STEPHENS, Vice President
BEAUREGARD, Brigadier General, C. S.

Scene: Public Room in Alexandria. The characters all present.

LINCOLN: In the annals of mankind, no crime In its sore effects is like that of smuggling, As I am here to witness; a wretched case Of sheer smuggling at Chicago, Twelve months ago, has brought me to this end. For in Convention motley, with strange intent, A multitude of spirits the land did darken, As it hath since appeared by nomination To my huge sorrow, and to the loss of all. By nature harmless and of gentle mood, Neither craving nor deserving honor, I was smuggled by officious and misguided friends, Through forms of trickery of doubtful kind, Into the Presidential canvass as champion Of the black man's rights, forgetful of my own. Charms, 'tis said, are practised by Afric's sons And daughters to gain each other's love. To me no such danger was apparent, When the ebon host I to victory led.

But now, in fearful storms I am o'erwhelmed, Wild and raging as the cold Alpine blast. The chair in which I was installed In Presidential grandeur, rocks me to death. Day and night it keeps in rapid motion, And with cruel violence my bones do shake. Friends, your pity I implore; look on my haggard face, And sunken eyes, my cheeks cadaverous,-On my shrivelled frame, and limbs That dangle in fleshless plight at my side? All this comes of *smuggling* at expense Of yours, gentle Secretary, wise Premier, To whom all gazing eyes were turned In Chicago's forum, as the heir at law Of the Black Legion, and its special crown. Most loving Premier, upon thy bold "conflict" I have trespassed, and here thy pardon crave.

SEWARD: Assuage thy groans, most potent chief And all thy groundless fear discard; So far from wrong, thy substitution is my delight. For, as thou art now, a wretched, hateful thing, Such would, perhaps, my fate have proved Hadst thou not kindly interposed thy visage, And thy majestic form these darts to absorb. I pray thee, chief, compose thy troubled mind: Give no heed to my expectation in time past— It hath long ceased to probe, as I confess it did, Into the soul and marrow of my calculation. The bugle of our glorious Abolition band, Didst hie thee to the charge, and the laurel Thou didst win, as hand to hand, With glittering steel, thou didst beard The Douglas in his Hall, and the spear Of the Union-loving Bell thou didst shiver, With Vernon Everett and his famed oration Thrust in the saddle to unhorse thy frame.

Then, Southern Breckinridge thou didst vanguish, With Yancev on his back to spur him through. To rehearse all thy deeds of deathless fame, Thy knightly bearing in the official race— Thy grave and solemn dignity on the road From thy own Springfield, and thy fearless stride Through wicked Baltimore, with thy meek arrival Where all thy honors waited thy acceptance, Even the White House itself—my skill in words Could not do thee justice, in thy bright extremity. In my failure to pay thee reverence, Such as thy peerless merit doth demand, I ask of thy Heroic Counsellor, thy guiding Star, That shone in Montezuma's Hall, not less Refulgent now because it sought in vain, Thy sphere to occupy as its rightful orbit. To thee, whose brow with laurel is entwined From Lundy's Lane to Cherubusco's height, I appeal to comfort our gracious lord.

SCOTT: Fortune hath played fantastic tricks, And brought me into strange companionship, Where no generous pulse doth responsive beat. In this sad condition my soul doth mount On wings of buoyant Hope to escape at last, From the stagnant, filthy, Abolition pool In which our gracious lord doth daily lave Under thy cleaning and grooming process, Most careful Secretary,—careful for thyself More than for thy country or for honest fame! My nature doth not incline to consultation With such a chattering magpie as thou art, Nor with such upstart pretenders as thy chief Who sits here, livid and trembling at my voice, The voice of one who may well command: For since the Father of his country passed away, With proudest title e'er conferred on man,—

That of Lieutenant General,—no sage Nor hero hath the immortal honor won, Until, laden from the battlefield, I came With glory on my name far more dazzling Than ever glittered from the imperial crown Of France, when on the brow of the *nephew's uncle!* Wellington the victor dwindled by my side, When Blucher's column sealed the fate of Waterloo. Atmosphere like this, fragrant with exalted deeds, And with names that stir the blood to action, Doth not refresh thy Abolition dwarfs With whom my presence is wrongly cast,— Yet wisely to restrain thy wolfish schemes. Were not the Funeral Triumph in my thoughts, The long procession and the stately hearse, Craped banners waving, and muffled drums,— Arms reversed, and the cannon's minute roar, Soothing me to repose in my warrior bed, After the battle of life is o'er,— I could not tolerate such awful bores As thyself and thy Presidential master,— But in scorn would yield up my commission.

If, from my compliance with thy request, Any comforting ministration thou hast perceived, I congratulate thy wit and keen discernment, To please *thy* gracious lord and MINE!!

LINCOLN: To my apprehension, howe'er such language May appear to others, it doth impart a sting, Against which my high authority and office Doth shield me, and protect from vengeance Whom the Constitution and the laws have placed Subordinate to my rule as army and naval chief. Yet, in the Lion's den, with no escape provided, I find myself a prisoner, doomed and helpless. My sceptre holds none but broken sway, And rank rebellion hath defied my power.

Carolina hath our noble Union severed, And Georgia by her disloyal side doth stand, Both seizing Forts at will, and war munitions, As though my public duty were to submit And not to govern bravely under oath, My sacred oath registered in Heaven! My doubts I have, constant and painful doubts, That my soul, from great mixture and alloy With thy "irrepressible conflict," will ne'er Ascend to where my oath, good Secretary, Is recorded side by side with thy "higher law." If consistency and force my brains do lack, May not I the gap supply with conscience, A tough India rubber conscience, or gum elastic, Of indefinite expansion, free indeed To clasp the tender reed or the giant oak, As either proportion may suit our aims? Then to a work of duty let us bow our minds, To bring the proud Confederate States to order, And humble their daring, traitorous crest, Which seeks to rival our Stars and Stripes, The only share we have of the public spoils Bequeathed to us by our Wheatland cousin. Pray now, prolific Secretary, thy opinion signify.

SEWARD: By Commission diplomatic, great sir, Thou hast been informed, months ago, and truly, That the Confederate States, seven in number, With Constitution duly framed and ratified, President and Vice President well installed, And Cabinet advisers chosen and sworn,—Toombs at their head, and Beauregard To lead the army,—in good faith sought of you Through my Department to be received, Acknowledged, and treated as sovereign Independent States, and by treaty fair To compose all questions territorial,

Forts, arsenals, customs, debts and the like, By just and equitable arrangement. To this proposal I was inclined to hearken, And to scatter all the specks of war Which dimmed the horizon, as you well know, And to this extent the said Commission I informed, Who with patience lingered on my hopeful words. Of your favor to this plan I was oft assured, And with honest will I so expressed your mind. But in your secret chamber a nest of vipers coiled, Greeley, Sumner, Chase, Blair and Webb, Who in their slimy folds crushed all reason out, And all honor, too, all reflection, from thy breast. At lonely midnight hour thy ships of war Didst leave for Sumter, and when there arrived, As thou didst imagine, and with stores And men the garrison did supply as invincible, Then, and not till then, did Gov. Pickens learn, By thy direction, thy cunning, hostile intent. But thy address, thy artful orders, proved vain; The storms of Heaven baffled thy design, And Beauregard, now present, performed the rest.

With war tidings thy proclamation filled the breeze, Every public journal, and each anxious fire-side. The North was roused, the South took the field, Virginia wheeled into line, and on her soil, An enemy's soil, we are now assembled At thy special instance to discuss the ways And means of peace, to prevent the blood Of brothers and kinsmen from being shed, When no real cause demands the sacrifice. I commend thee to thy brother President, Buena Vista Davis, thy equal in rank, With whom consultation may be had, Touching the essence of our present troubles.

LINCOLN: Brave sir, we together served in civil life, On the same floor as Representatives equal. Some fatal blunder of my own committing, or else The error of my friends (both perhaps combined) Hath in rival lists placed our fortunes. Your objections to my rule I well appreciate, And the time has gone for reconcilement. At war as public men, both first in office, In our respective spheres,—you South, And I to Northern lines confined in power, No impeachment of honor do I construe it, To ask in terms respectful what will suffice Thy requirement for the Confederate States. Personally, sir, no accommodation do I ask, And will none expect in this discourse; But in behalf of millions who to my banner cling, And the millions who rally under yours, With equal courage and consent of mind, Do I propose this opportunity for mutual peace.

All were brothers once, from Bunker Hill To Camden and the plains of Yorktown. Again, at later period, from Niagara's roar, Where Brown and Scott commanded, To New Orleans, the field of Jackson's fame; And still more recent when on the Rio Grande, Taylor unfurled our country's Flag, and at Palo Alto, The first battle fought, and then to Monterey, And Buena Vista next, where you, sir, in person Drove back Santa Anna's host with your Rifle corps— All continued victorious, no default. And yet all is not related; at Vera Cruz, And on Cerro Gordo's crags, at Contreras, At Molina del Rey, and at the gates Of the great Capital of Mexico, itself delivered To the conqueror Scott, who mingles in our counsels,— These recollections do stir my blood to kindness, To fraternal love, which may you reciprocate.

DAVIS: My purpose is not new, -not framed Merely to answer this occasion;—the terms are simple, And in few words will be conveyed to arrest This unhappy war which you did force With more than common zeal, without cause. The past I will not review, your party platform, Your threats to o'erturn the status of the South; Nor will I to your remembrance bring. With offensive intent, the fair warning voice Given by the South that Abolition rule Would be resisted, even the Union to disrupt. Of this resolve you were amply notified, And still with reckless stride you and yours, The anti-slavery men in determined column, Through a fanatic ballot, pressed us to the wall. Our sovereignty we resumed as promised, And Confederate Government formed, and at your door Respectfully, yet firmly asked for recognition, Which you declined to grant, and then events Followed which, did not his modesty hinder, Gen. Beauregard, at my right, could well describe, As therein he active participation had Far beyond my own desert or directing.

Now, Mr. President, this war can be arrested By a dozen lines of writing, and your honor saved, And many lives and millions of treasure. The Independence of the Confederate States, first of all, Acknowledge, and then we'll negotiate on terms Of mutual justice, seeking no advantage Or concession of each other; then, if inclined, Commercial treaties we may form, and trade As friends, all our rights secure, and Our negroes you must let alone;
We will answer for the sin, not you, sir,
In all the future, and at the bar of Heaven.
If to this outline you will at once subscribe
Our Southern army shall at once retire;
Otherwise, to the bitter end the war must come
In defence of Southern rights, and, dearer still,
Vindicating Southern honor by you assailed
In occupying Forts on Southern soil.—
Here is the argument, and here the terms,
To which your answer will be heard.

LINCOLN: To borrow phrase from quarters high, To double fire I am exposed, front and rear. Such exceeding danger my life doth menace, That capitulation could not save me, Nor by fighting can I long survive. Beyond retrieve my doom is fixed, And horror doth my spirit overwhelm. My peace with Heaven and man to make, Is all the privilege my soul doth claim. Fool that I was to withhold assent To the Confederate offer of adjustment, By your high Commission to me tendered. With starving Anderson I trifled, and with all Who took part in Sumter's fearful siege, Which brought on the war, and ruin. I am the guilty cause of all the blood Spilt on either side in this unnatural war, And terrible shall be my expiation.

There is no safety in retreat, nor in advancing,—
For if I stop the war, the mob infuriate
Who for want of Southern trade are starving,
Would rend me limbless, and my head
On staff would fix like that of traitor,

Who had cut them off from general pillage
In the luxuriant South, in town and country—
Banks all robbed of gold, dwellings of silver plate.
In masses far too heavy for men to bear,
And in six mule wagons will be hauled
To Northern camp, there boxed and shipped
For future revel, and sensuous delights.
The South through me has been wholly lost,
And by such loss the North is desolate,
Never to regain its former thrift and power.

My error I confess; and you beloved Premier, Bear to absent friend my dying words, And acquaint the public with their import—How, that having my country ruined, I yielded up my life in honest retribution, Hoping that my sins will be forgiven, As all men freely I forgive—Farewell!

[Lincoln stabs himself, and dies.]

SCOTT: How rapid and portentous do events progress, Shutting me in limits narrow, to degrade my soul! Poor Lincoln my advice rejected, though asked, In regard to Sumter; my conscience has no blood To crimson its emotions in my dying hour, From unholy war of brothers by Lincoln waged. Much better had I resigned in early stage Of this revolution, since Virginia has espoused it, My honored mother! Can I the shock survive? Lincoln dead, and his office cast on Hamlin, Who with negro blood is said to be defiled. Can I this double degradation bear, And feel myself a man, who alone, after Washington, The rank of Lieutenant General hath possessed?

If I resign, no funeral honors, equal To my renown, will be paid me when I die;

And if, under Hamlin, my commission I retain, I shall despise myself, and so will all mankind. To you, gallant Davis, who, while Secretary, Did write me sharp and bitter notes, imputing To me vanity and pride beyond compare, I have a few kind words to offer as my last. Let us be friends and forget the past. As a generous rival and soldier brave, Do justice to my memory in Southern hearts,— For the North is heartless, and cares not for fame, Except for golden eagles,—not the bird of Jove, Who hath been the emblem of our glory. My day is gone, four score years press me hard, And my native State has cursed me As a recreant son,-my birth spot dishonored By special marks of scorn on my nativity. Such accumulated woes my heart hath broke, And no longer can I the burden of a life Endure when robbed of its honest pride. Lincoln's folly was sore enough, but Hamlin's blood Completes my downfall, my official death, And with it my last breath I yield, Supplicating Heaven for mercy on my soul!

[With an energetic thrust, Gen. Scott drives his sword through his heart, and falls gracefully—his countenance wearing a grand expression even in death.]

SEWARD: Bloodshed! Horror on horrors, by slavery piled!! Weak and shallow Lincoln shall be avenged, And thou too, imperial soldier, noble as brave, Who to secure a stately, splendid burial, Didst hide thy scorn to hold thy office; With ample vengeance thou shalt be repaid. On you, Davis and Beauregard, a doom is fixed; You I will accuse of murder, President of President, And the junior General of the famous Senior,

From long cherished hate and envy's sting. In the hot bed of slavery's vile abominations Nursed, and fully grown to murder foul Millions in the North who now linger back For want of motive to destroy the South, Will to the "conflict" hasten with mind and fury At once "irrepressible," of shameless type. To their slaves Southern masters shall be subject, And slaves shall scourge their former owners With bloody stripes, and I will mock their agony! On, freedom's sons, anti-slavery friends press on; My tale of murdered Lincoln by hand of Davis, Will credence gain, and perform the work. Davis implicate and likewise Beauregard, Can no audience have on rules of evidence. Both will be excluded, and only Stephens Will remain to gainsay my big report. Yes, slavery's champion, I have thee on my hip, To unhinge all thy doings, and gain the right. Thy spotless name, and thy dulcet voice Which millions do revere and love, I'll tarnish and weaken by calling thee "Robber," Worse than high-way robber; more foul Because thou has robbed thy helpless brother Of his birthright, his lawful freedom, And hast made him thy bond slave, A chattel, like horse or oxen sold Remorseless, without fear of God or man. Know thou, Vice President, as thou art called By rebel and traitor bands, that no "robber" Was e'er believed in Court, by jury or by crowd. This logic to degrade thee is all my own, By words nicely weighed and to freedom joined, Harmony producing and a phantom wild To excite imagination beyond all sober truth. Then the deed is done and the South undone, As thou art advertised by defiant zeal.

From thy presence, and thy compeers high In authority stolen, I now retire,
My report to scatter to the winds of Heaven,
And bring upon you all the charge
Of murder, wanton murder, constructive,
Actual, complete, and of malice prepense,
Calling for gibbet, and the country's vengeance.
Adieu, lifeless friend, my Springfield chief,—
Thy memory shall be sacred from all taint
Of felo de se; on Davis I will fix the crime,
And Beauregard shall hang for killing Scott.

[Seward haughtily retires.]

STEPHENS: Surely has Iago been in flesh revived, And another Moor seeks to entangle By web of sophistry and falsehood vile. My truth, my life, my honest aims at good, My love of country and my social hopes, All avail me nothing in this hour of trial If Seward can have his wicked way. Yet the right will I defend come what may, And truly given the facts in public shall appear,— How that violent hands Lincoln laid upon himself, With what confession, and in what extremity. Now, Davis, no defilement shall thy honor touch In this transaction awful, this twain self-murder Truth the smile of Heaven will be sure to draw Upon all its struggles, and prevail it must, In spite of Iago Seward, the cunning imp Who if possible, would Deity dethrone, And make a flat nosed African ruler of the world, With him, Seward, the counsels to direct, As in Lincoln's Cabinet was recently the case. The South with sword in hand defies the North, And Beauregard the wiles of Seward shall escape. Come, let us withdraw and leave the dead

To find sepulture suited to their rank, From those who claim the right of such civility. As open enemies of the South they died, While warring our people to exterminate, Though Lincoln was better in his heart Than the rabid crew who to frenzy drove him. With his frail body let his foibles find repose, And be only published his errors to avoid By those who to his office may succeed, And thus inherit the luckless war now raging. May peace be accorded by mutual compact, As the Confederate States did once propose Through their Commission which was repelled. But no offer shall we again communicate;— National honor and self-respect forbid Our second suit tranquillity to gain. Of our armies we make no empty boast, Leaving that vocation where most it prospers, In the bigot North, who from necessity of taste, Make up in sham for want of real worth, And for deficient cause in which to fight.

DAVIS: The motion to retire I again renew, And hope compliance will be granted. To the unhappy dead, forgiveness and farewell Is all the boon I have to offer, and 'tis enough; Their memories to defame no task of mine shall be, The grave shall shelter their infirmities As it hath extinguished all my hatred.

[President Davis takes up his hat, and advances toward the door; Vice President Stephens prepares to follow.]

BEAUREGARD: Of thee, Mr. President, one favor do I ask—Permission to remain as guard of honor
To the illustrious General of whom I learned
The arts of war, and whose noble form,

At the head of his brilliant Staff, I saw
Riding in triumph as conqueror of Mexico,
Thro' the streets of Montezuma's proud city,—
The "Stars and Stripes" waving o'er the Empire.
Tho' dead, my old commander in my heart doth live,
And to his record I shall ne'er be unjust,
Howe'er against the South he erred,
And died enemy of the States I serve.
His glorious past is written ne'er to be reversed,
Nor would I wither a leaf of his laurel crown,
Won in victorious battles for his country's honor.
Allow me to guard his dust until an escort
Shall convey it to its last resting place.
Then I will resign my honored charge,
And forthwith join you in the tented field.

DAVIS: Thy tenderness, dear General, I value, And thy wishes shall not be declined. Remain with both the dead, no common dead, Of what was once a Republic glorious, *The United States*—President was one, and Lieutenant-General the other, famed in story. Obey thy gratitude and thy spotless honor, And watch alone with the official dead, Until others shall thy post relieve: Noble is the soldier's tribute to a fallen foe.

[President Davis and Vice President Stephens then respectfully bow to Gen. Beauregard, who, returning the civility, remains standing with folded arms, reverently gazing on the face of Gen. Scott.]

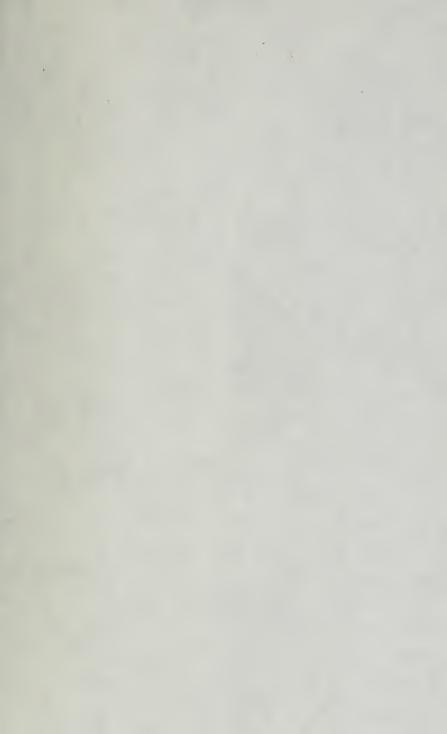


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